

## The Phonograph and the Graft

By O. HENRY

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LOOKED in at the engine room of the Bloomfield-Carter Manufacturing company, limited, for the engineer was Kirksy, and there was a golden half hour between the time he shut down steam and washed up that I coveted.

I found Kirksy resting, with his pipe lit, smut faced and blue overalled.

"Tis a fair afternoon," I said, "but bids to be colder."

"Did I ever tell you," began Kirksy honorably, "about the time Henry Horsecollar and me took a phonograph to South America?" And I felt ashamed of my subterfuge and dropped into the wooden chair he kicked toward me.

"Henry was a quarter breed, quarterback Cherokee, educated at the idios of football and west in contraband whisky, and a gentleman, same as you or me. He was easy and rumping in his ways; a man about six foot, with a kind of rubber tire movement."

"Henry and me met at Texarkana and figured out this phonograph scheme. He had \$300 which came to him out of a land allotment in the reservation. I had run down from Little Rock on account of a distressful scene I had witnessed on the street there. A man stood on a box and passed around some gold watches, screw case, stem winders, Elgin movement, very elegant. Twenty bucks they cost you over the counter. At \$3 the crowd fought for the tickers. The man happened to find a valise full of them handy, and he passed them out like putting hot biscuits on a plate. The backs were hard to unscrew, but the crowd put its ear to the case, and they ticked mollifying and agreeable. Three of those watches were genuine tickers, but the rest, they were only kickers."

"Hey? Why, empty cases, with one of them horny black bugs that fly around electric lights in 'em. Them bugs kick off minutes and seconds industrious and beautiful. The man I was speaking of cleaned up \$288 and went away, because he knew that when it came to wind watches in Little Rock an entomologist would be needed, and he wasn't one."

"So, as I say, Henry had \$300 and I had \$288. The phonograph idea was Henry's, but I took to it freely, being fond of machinery of all kinds."

"We bought a fine phonograph in Texarkana—one of the best make—and half a trunkful of records. We packed up and took the T. and P. for New Orleans. From that celebrated center of molasses and disfranchised coon songs we took a steamer for—yes, I think it was South America or Mexico—I am full of inability to divulge the location of it—'tis on the rural delivery map, 'tis colored yellow on the map and branded with the literature of cigar boxes."

"We landed on a smiling coast at a town they denominated by the name, as near as I can recollect, of Sore-toe-kangaroo. 'Twas a palatable enough place to look at. The houses were clean and white, sticking about among the scenery like hard boiled eggs served with lettuce. There was a block of skyscraper mountains in the suburbs, and they kept pretty quiet, like they were laying one finger on their lips and watching the town. And the sea was remarking 'Sh-sh-sh' on the beach, and now and then a ripe cocoonant would fall kerdip in the sand, and that was all there was doing."

"The captain went ashore with us and offered to conduct what he seemed to like to call the obsequies. He introduced Henry and me to the United States consul and a roan man, the head of the department of mercenary and lileentious disposition, the way it read upon his sign."

"I touch here again a week from today," says the captain.

"By that time," we told him, "we'll be amassing wealth in the interior towns with our galvanized prima donna and correct imitations of Sousa's hand excavating a march from a tin mine."

"Ye'll not," says the captain. "Ye'll be hypnotized. Any gentleman in the audience who kindly steps upon the stage and looks this country in the eye will be converted to the hypothesis that he's but a fly in the Elgin creamery. Ye'll be standing knee deep in the surf waiting for me, and your machine for making hamburger steak out of the hitherto respected art of music will be playing 'There's no place like home.'"

"Henry skinned a twenty off his roll and received from the bureau of mercenary dispositions a paper bearing a red seal and a dialect story, and no change."

"Then we got the consul full of red wine and struck him for a horseshoe. He was a thin, youngish kind of man, I should say past fifty, sort of French-Irish in his affections and puffed up with disconsolation. Yes, he was a flattened kind of a man in whom drink lay stagnant, inclined to corpulence and misery. Yes, I think he was a kind of Dutchman, being very sad and genial in his ways."

"The marvelous invention," he says, "entitled the phonograph has never before invaded these shores. The people have never heard it. They would not believe it if they should. Simple hearted children of nature, progress has never condemned them to accept the work of a can opener as an overture, and ragtime might incite them to a bloody revolution. But you can try the experiment. The best chance you have is that the populace may not wake up when you play. There's two ways," says the consul, "they may take it—they may become incipiently wild attention, like an Atlanta colonel listening to 'Morehning Through Georgia,' or they will get excited and transpire the

key of the music with an ax and your selves into a dungeon. In the latter case," says the consul, "I'll do my duty by cabling to the state department, and I'll wrap the stars and stripes around you when you come to be shot, and threaten them with the vengeance of the greatest gold export and financial reserve nation on earth. The flag is full of bullet holes now." Twice before," says the consul, "I have cabled our government for a couple of gunboats to protect American citizens. The first time the department sent me a pair of gum boots. The other time was when a man named Pease was going to be executed here. They referred that appeal to the secretary of agriculture. Let us now disturb the senator behind the bar for a subsequence of the red wine."

"Thus soliloquized the consul of Sore-toe-kangaroo to me and Henry Horsecollar."

"But, notwithstanding, we hired a room that afternoon in the Calle de los Angeles, the main street that runs along the shore, and put our trunks there. 'Twas a good sized room, dark and cheerful, but small. 'Twas on a



"A big, fine looking white man looked in."

various street, diversified by houses and conservatory plants. The peasantry of the city passed to and fro on the fine pasturage between the sidewalks. 'Twas, for the world, like an opera chorus when the Royal Kafozium is about to enter."

"We were rubbing the dust off the machine and getting fixed to start business the next day when a big, fine looking white man in white clothes stopped at the door and looked in. We extended the invitations, and he walked inside and sized us up. He was chewing a long cigar and wrinkling his eyes, meditative, like a girl trying to decide which dress to wear to the party."

"New York?" he says to me finally.

"Originally, and from time to time," I says. "Hasn't it rubbed off yet?"

"It's simple," says he, "when you know how. It's the fit of the vest. They don't cut vests right anywhere else. Coats, maybe, but not vests."

"The white man looks at Henry Horsecollar and hesitates."

"Injun," says Henry, "tame Injun."

"Mellinger," says the man—"Homer P. Mellinger. Boys, you're confiscated."

"You're babes in the wood without a chaperon or referee, and it's my duty to start you going. I'll knock out the props and launch you proper in the pellucid waters of Sore-toe-kangaroo. You'll have to be christened, and if you'll come with me I'll break a bottle of wine across your bows, according to Hoyle."

"Well, for two days Homer P. Mellinger did the honors. That man cut ice in Sore-toe-kangaroo. He was it. He was the Royal Kafozium. If me and Henry was babes in the wood, he was a Robin Redbreast from the topmost bough. Him and me and Henry Horsecollar locked arms and toted that phonograph around and had wassail and diversion. There was vino tinto and vino blanco to drink with every tune. The aborigines had acquisitions of a pleasant thing in the way of drinks that gums itself to the recollection. They chop off the end of a green cocoonant and pour in on the liquor of it French brandy and gin. We had them and other things."

"Mine and Henry's money was counterfeited. Everything was on Homer P. Mellinger. That man could find rolls of bills in his clothes where Hermann the Wizard couldn't have conjured out an omelet. He could have founded universities and had enough left to buy the colored vote of his country. Henry and me wondered what his graft was. One evening he told us."

"Boys," says he, "I've deceived you. Instead of a painted butterfly, I'm the hardest worked man in this country. Ten years ago I landed on its shores and two years ago on the point of its jaw. Yes, I reckon I can get the decision over this ginger cake commonwealth at the end of any round I choose. I'll confide in you because you are my countrymen and guests, even if you have committed an assault upon my adopted shores with the worst system of noises ever set to music."

"My job is private secretary to the president of this republic, and my duties are running it. I'm not headlined in the bills, but I'm the mustard in the salad dressing. There isn't a law goes before congress, there isn't a concession granted, there isn't an import duty levied, but what H. P. Mellinger, he cooks and seasons it. In the front office I fill the president's inkstand and search visiting statesmen for dynamite; in the back room I dictate the policy of the government. You'd never guess how I got the pull. It's the only graft of its kind in the world. I'll put you wise. You remember the topline

in the old copy books. 'Honesty is the best policy.' That's it. I'm the only honest man in this republic. The government knows it; the people know it; the bootlickers know it; the foreign investors know it. I make the government keep its faith. If a man is promised a job he gets it; if outside capital buys a concession they get the goods. I run a monopoly of square dealing here. There's no competition. If Colonel Diogenes were to flash his lantern in this precinct he'd have my address inside of two minutes. There isn't big money in it, but it's a sure thing and lets a man sleep of nights."

"Thus Homer P. Mellinger made oration to me and Henry Horsecollar in Sore-toe-kangaroo. And later he divested himself of this remark:

"Boys, I'm to hold a soiree this evening with a gang of leading citizens, and I want your assistance. You bring the musical corn sheller and give the affair the outside appearance of a function. There's important business on hand, but it mustn't show. I can talk to you people. I've been pained for years on account of not having anybody to blow off and brag to. I get homesick sometimes, and I'd swap the entire perquisites of office for just one hour to have a stein and a caviare sandwich somewhere on Thirty-fourth street and stand and watch the street cars go by and smell the peanut roaster at old Giuseppe's fruit stand."

"Yes," said I, "there's fine caviare at Billy Renfrow's cafe, corner of Thirty-fourth and—"

"God knows it," interrupts Mellinger, "and if you'd told me you knew Billy Renfrow I'd have invented tons of ways of making you happy. Billy was my side kicker in New York. That is a man you never knew what crooked was. Here I am working honestly for a graft, but that man loses money on it. Carrambos! I get sick at times of this country. Everything's rotten. From the executive down to the coffee pickers they're plotting to down each other and skin their friends. If a mule driver takes off his hat to an official, that man figures it out that he's a popular idol and sets his pegs to stir up a revolution and upset the administration. It's one of my little chores as private secretary to smell out these revolutions and affix the kibosh before they break out and scratch the paint off the government property. That's why I'm down here now in this mildewed coast town. The governor of the district and his crew are plotting to uprise. I've got every one of their names, and they're invited to listen to the phonograph tonight, compliments of H. P. M. That's the way I'll get them in a bunch, and things are on the programme to happen to them."

"We three were sitting at table in the cantina of the Purified Saints. Mellinger poured out wine and was looking some worried. I was thinking.

(To Be Continued.)

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## SOUTHERN

Tries to Buy Queen and Crescent System Outright.

Nashville, Tenn., May 22.—According to information obtained here today through a high railroad official, the Southern railroad has practically completed a deal by which it purchases outright the interests of the city of Cincinnati in the Cincinnati Southern railway, dissolves the Cincinnati New Orleans and Texas Pacific railroad Co. and merges the property with the Southern railway proper. This will be done it is said by paying the city of Cincinnati cash and bonds for its interests and the mere dissolution of the Cincinnati, New Orleans and Texas Pacific Railroad company, the latter organization being already owned by the Southern railway interests.

The Cincinnati Southern is now forming the connection for several of the Southern's lines. The Louisville-St. Louis lines, the Nashville division and several smaller roads in East Tennessee, as well as the new line being built toward Charleston and Savannah, depend upon this line for North and South business.

The company has recently issued two hundred millions in bonds, and only eighty-five millions of that amount has been appropriated or apportioned. The remainder, it is said, is reserved to pay for the Cincinnati Southern, build the Savannah and Charleston, cut off from Knoxville to Anderson, S. C., and a second track from Cincinnati to Chattanooga. According to the information obtained here the official announcement of the deal will be made in July.

## DISTRICT DEPUTIES

Meet at Clinton and Paducah Knights Attend.

J. T. Stuart, grand chancellor, and J. W. Carter, grand keeper of records and seal, of the state grand lodge of Knights of Pythias, met with the local lodge last night. This morning they left for Clinton, Ky. to attend a meeting of the district deputies. The following Paducahans went to Clinton to attend the meeting: Messrs. Henry Adkins, L. S. Gleaves, A. E. Young, A. Culp, A. D. Buchanan, L. M. Brooks, L. L. Smith and Ernest Baumgard.

## Public Sale of Franchise.

Paducah, Ky., May 7, 1906.

I will offer for sale, at the city hall door, on the 30th day of May, 1906, between the hours of 10 and 12 o'clock a. m., a franchise for operating a street railway in the city of Paducah, in accordance with an ordinance recently passed ordering such sale, and in accordance with the terms and conditions reserved in such ordinance.

The city reserves the right to reject all and all bids.

O. B. STARKS, Acting Mayor, City of Paducah, Ky.

## Tax Bill Nearly Ready.

Work on the city tax bills is progressing and the bill will probably be finished this week. They must be in the hands of the treasurer for collection by June 1.

Sheriff John Ogilvie and deputies are making out county tax bills. They started the work yesterday, and it will require many weeks for completion.

## Exposure.

To cold draughts of air, to keen and cutting winds, sudden changes of the temperature, scanty clothing, undue exposure of the throat and neck after public speaking and singing, bring on coughs and colds.

Ballard's Horehound Syrup is the best cure. Mrs. A. Barr, Houston, Tex., writes, January 31, 1902: "One bottle of Ballard's Horehound Syrup cured me of a very bad cough. It is very pleasant to take."

Sold by Alvey & List.

## Trip for His Health.

City Solicitor James Campbell and wife will leave the latter part of the week for the West. Solicitor Campbell has been in bad health for several months, suffering from rheumatism, and has been advised by his physician to take a trip west.

## Growing Aches and Pains.

Mrs. Josie Sumner, Bremont, Tex., writes, April 15, 1902: "I have used Ballard's Snow Liniment in my family for three years. I would not be without it in the house. I have used it on my little girl for growing pains and aches in her knees. It cured her right away. I have also used it for frost bitten feet, with good success. It is the best liniment I ever used." 25c, 50c and \$1.00.

Sold by Alvey & List.

## The Lipton Cup.

The cup offered by Sir Thomas Lipton will be the prize for the winner of the ocean yacht race to Bermuda, which will be started under the auspices of the Brooklyn Yacht club May 26. The race is for small yachts of not less than thirty-eight nor more than fifty feet.

## A Positive Necessity.

Having to lay upon my bed for 14 days from a severely bruised leg, I only found relief when I used a bottle of Ballard's Snow Liniment. I can cheerfully recommend it as the best medicine for bruises ever sent to the afflicted. It has now become a positive necessity upon myself.

D. R. Byrnes, Merchant, Doversville, Texas, 25c and 50c and \$1.00.  
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